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# To the Moon and Back

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To the Moon and Back

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2010

May 2017  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

Almost fifty years after the Apollo 11 mission, the moon landing remains one of humankind's most remarkable technological achievements. On the lunar surface, the Eagle's flight crew left behind an American flag, mementos honoring those who lost their lives in the quest for such an achievement, and a plaque reading, "Here men from the planet Earth set foot upon the moon. July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind." Despite overwhelming proof of this achievement—radio transmissions, photographs, film, rock and soil samples—a sizable minority of Americans continue to view the Apollo 11 moon landing as a hoax. *To the Moon and Back* takes this conspiratorial lens as a point of departure, exploring the history of NASA and the subsequent Apollo 11 moon landing as both a case study in period-specific Americanism, as well as a contemporary armature through which the construction of belief is examined. Prints, drawings, paintings sculpture, and music offer a narrative matrix of myth, folklore, conspiracy, faith, and fiction, and fact, with the goal of challenging our ideologies and histories in the contemporary post-factual landscape.

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## **Dedication**

*To the Moon and Back* is dedicated to my brother, Travis James Pennekamp, whose constant inquisitive spirit and fascination with all things “strange” is a continuous influence on both my worldview and artistic practice.

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## To the Moon and Back

### Introduction

On July 20, 1969, the American lunar module The Eagle landed on the surface of Earth's moon, with mission commander Neil Armstrong ceremoniously opening the lander's door to become the first human to step foot on the extraterrestrial sphere.<sup>1</sup> While descending from the Eagle to the moon's surface, Armstrong transmitted the phrase, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."<sup>2</sup> The spacecraft's pilot Buzz Aldrin joined Armstrong shortly afterward, as the two men explored the lunar surface for nearly two and a half hours.

The Apollo 11 moon landing was, and arguably remains, the most incredible technological achievement in the history of man. The Eagle's crew left behind an American flag, mementos honoring those who lost their lives in the quest for such an achievement, and a plaque reading, "Here men from the planet Earth set foot upon the moon. July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all mankind."<sup>3</sup> The mission captivated a worldwide audience for eight days, marked the end of the space race between the United States and the former Soviet Union, and galvanized an American spirit characterized by exploration, discovery, ingenuity, and bravery. Despite the irrefutable proof of this achievement—radio transmissions, photographs, film, rock and soil

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<sup>1</sup> Six hours passed between the landing of The Eagle and Armstrong's spacecraft exit, making his famous moonwalk take place the next day, July 21, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> According to Armstrong biographer, James Hansen, the original line, which Armstrong wrote and rewrote in preparation for his historic achievement, was meant to be "One small step for *a* man, one giant leap for mankind" Armstrong himself has insisted regarding "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." as a misquote. Arguing, "I think that reasonable people will realize that I didn't intentionally make an inane statement and that certainly the 'a' was intended, because that's the only way the statement makes any sense." (Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11, Brian Floca)

<sup>3</sup> Rather than being ceremoniously displayed and left atop a pedestal on the lunar face, the Apollo 11 commemorative plaque was attached to the dissent ladder of The Eagle and left on the lunar surface along with the rest of Apollo 11's landing equipment.  
([https://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/moonmars/apollo40/apollo11\\_plaque.html](https://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/moonmars/apollo40/apollo11_plaque.html))



samples, and our ability to visually interact with former moon landing sites with telescopes and lasers—a sizable minority of Americans view the Apollo 11 moon landing as a hoax.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, the writer and editor Brandon Griggs argued, based on his observations of web content and Gallup polls, that the number of moon landing deniers had grown.<sup>5</sup>

In 1992, the screenwriter, playwright, and novelist Steve Teisch coined the word “post-truth” to describe an American cultural landscape increasingly circumscribed by a dearth of evidenced-based conclusions. Teisch cites the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals as harbingers of this new era—here one of “post-truth politics”—wherein emotion and morality drove data analysis and decision-making. This post-truth narrative runs through the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush’s subsequent “War on Terror,” and Donald J. Trump’s presidency, which introduced “alternative fact” to the post-truth lexicon.<sup>6</sup>

The daily disruption of the truth, increasingly the norm in American society, finds consonance with and fuels conspiracy theories about everything from how elections are won to who can be identified as the source of terrorist attacks to events that most have long taken for granted as historical fact. The historian Richard Hofstadter warned of the dangers of turning history into a series of untruths and eventual conspiracy theories. While citing the sociologist C. Wright Mills, he argues, “There is a great difference ‘between locating conspiracies in history and saying that history is, in effect, a conspiracy,’ between singling out those conspiratorial acts

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<sup>4</sup> The technological advancements of the space race led to the development of domestic and commercial wares that people across the globe still use to this day from cordless power tools to modern water filtration methods.

<sup>5</sup> News editor Brandon Griggs elucidates on the significance of moon landing deniers in a 2009 article for CNN after NASA’s Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter returned high resolution photographs of the lunar surface to Earth, showing the abandoned landing gear of Apollo 11 and subsequent NASA missions.

<sup>6</sup> In an article titled “Post-Truth and Its Consequences: What a 25-Year-Old Essay Tells Us About the Current Moment,” published in the *Nation*, Richard Kreitner discusses the relevance of Steve Teisch’s essay “A Government of Lies” in which he coins the term “post-truth.”

that do on occasion occur and weaving a vast fabric of social explanation out of nothing but skeins of evil plots.”<sup>7</sup> When evidence and truth dissociates into alternative facts and conspiracies, knowledge no longer yields power, but oppression in the hands of those who control the new subjective message. At a rally in Florida, President Trump argued that “We are not going to let the fake news tell us what to do, how to live and what to believe. We are free, independent people and we will make our own choices.”<sup>8</sup> Belief, rather than knowledge, lies at the heart of a new American political regime that promises to “Make America Great Again” by myth-making freedom and prosperity while dismantling laws that protect people and land, and making new ones that destroy and oppress. In 1998, Frederic Jameson argued that one might be “tempted” to call “Conspiracy...the poor person’s cognitive mapping into the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content.”<sup>9</sup> With his Marxist interpretation Jameson seems to get at the inevitability of truth manufacturing and conspiracy theories in the spectacular age of late capitalism. In considering Hofstadter, Mills, and Jameson, one can see that the history of “alternative facts” is long and its stakes, perhaps, never higher in terms of the power structures of late Capitalism to occlude the actualities of our existence, to give the power, as Marshall McLuhan once argued, the ability to massage the masses with their medium of untruth.

And this is why the persistence of moon-landing conspiracies, in the face of overwhelming textual, auditory, and visual data providing evidence to refute such lunar untruths, should strike one not as a fringe element of thinking or amusing area of research, but part of a

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Grandin, “What is the Deep State?,” *The Nation* (17 Feb. 2017) (accessed 19 Feb. 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Ben Jacobs, “Trump Attacks ‘Dishonest Media’ While Making False Claims at Florida Rally,” *The Guardian* (18 Feb. 2017), (accessed 19 Feb. 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Greg Grandin, “What is the Deep State?,” *The Nation* (17 Feb. 2017) (accessed 19 Feb. 2017).

much broader set of sociopolitical concerns about who determines the truth, for what reasons, and why people ultimately accept or reject evidenced-based facts or myths.

### **In Preparation for My Moon Landing**

As with most creative endeavors, my thesis works stands as a culmination of my experiences in the world and my informal and formal training in the visual arts to date. In our family basement, my mother recently came across a collection drawings I had made as a child—many of them monsters—and remarked that in some ways I am still making those same drawings. What could easily be viewed as a sentimental observance might instead suggest a certain nostalgia and persistence of experience, both within the comforts of my drawing craft and the kinds of things I have long been interested in—monsters, aliens, superheroes and villains, astronauts—and the fantastical worlds, imagined or real, these incredible beings generate.

When I came to graduate school in 2014, I had been working on imagery attending to the notion of “depressive realism,” as well as the pitfalls of escapist behaviors (e.g. overly identifying with a given film character). In 1988, the psychiatrists Lauren Alloy and Lyn Yvonne Abramson coined the controversial hypothesis depressive realism to explain how the worldview of depressed individuals can be more realistic than that of those not depressed. More recently, studies have further suggested that individuals who suffer from depression also have a stronger sense of empathy than those who do not struggle with depression. I explored puerile imagery, through puppets and prints, in order to process a world that many view as cruel and indifferent.

In my first year, I also turned my attention to the sociopolitical sphere. In the summer of 2014, a young man named Michael Brown was murdered by police officer Darren Wilson. This tragic event sparked national outrage, protests, and riots in the streets of my hometown of St.

Louis. While my sympathies aligned with the outraged, I held real concerns for my own friends and family members threatened by the violence. At this point, my work contemplated the finality of death through fallacies regarding motivated reasoning, isolationism, and groupthink. Though this body of work proved rather reactionary and provided less conceptual depth than I wanted, it did allow me to begin to consider materiality in a deliberate fashion, and to understand cognitive bias and the construction of personal and social narratives.

In my second year, as I approached candidacy, concerns regarding groupthink and cognitive biases remained my bailiwick. The lens through which I examined these ideas, however, changed considerably. Instead of creating work as an immediate reaction to specific events, I began to reflect on my own personal biases and belief system. And I started to do this while revisiting my childhood fascination with the fantastical and supernatural. In addition to a transition in conceptual lens, the work in my second year also experienced a shift in visual influence. My drafting style turned from one influenced by Ub Iwerks and Tex Avery to one inspired by the work of E.C. Comics, Wally Wood, and Basil Wolverton. I used adolescent narratives surrounding a phenomenon known as “Legend Tripping” as catalysts to discuss superstition and myth.<sup>10</sup> Using a surreal logic inspired by the dream drawings of Jim Shaw, I avoided providing concrete answers within the compositions themselves, instead creating pieces that spurred a flurry of questions.

Inspired by the narratives and surreal logic of my previous works, I followed a conceptual and visual program that blurred the ideas of reality and myth further still. For my

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<sup>10</sup> “Legend Tripping” is a term used to describe the adolescent practice of visiting alleged sites of supernatural or paranormal events. Some anthropologists argue for the significance of this phenomenon in western cultures as a direct parallel to rituals and rites of passage observed in tribal cultures of the developing world. According to S. Elizabeth Bird in her essay *Playing with Fear: Interpreting the Adolescent Legend Trip*, participation in Legend Tripping allows adolescents to explore complex social hierarchies and establish dominance within peer groups.

candidacy review I created a series of large-scale presidential portraits. I selected presidents known for their significant role in the purported relations between humankind and extraterrestrial relations. Each president had either gone on-record as witnessing UFOs (e.g. Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter) or served as POTUS during key unexplained events (e.g. Truman and the crash of an unidentified object in Roswell, New Mexico). Unlike traditional portraiture, however, I depicted the presidents in my drawings as atmospheric phenomena of the night sky, looming over specific American landscapes.

### **Launch Status Check**

While drawing remains the starting point for my work, and printmaking the center of my training, as with all of my art, historically, I have embraced a range of media. This exhibition, specifically, features elements of drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, and, for the first time, sound. I began by making a series of astronaut portraits, printed on standard residential nylon American flags. I started this project with the portrait of Captain James Tiberius Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise and moved on to Commander Neil Alden Armstrong. I chose to present the astronauts of Apollo 11—Neil Armstrong, Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, and Michael Collins—with a corresponding science fiction space hero. The portraits transitioned from historical to fictional and back again as I researched the Apollo 11 flight crew and recalled my own personal history with science fiction heroes. I screen printed these portraits on mail-order American flags. This series, entitled *American Icons* presents a critique of patriotism and questions American authenticity. The intermingling of science fiction space heroes and American astronauts obstructs the historic accomplishments of Apollo 11 by pinning the fantastical nostalgia of sci-fi to the

actuality of space exploration. The authority and authenticity are questioned further still by the flags themselves. What does it mean when the symbols of American ingenuity and superiority are produced in another country? Here we see more play between the Capitalistic and Marxists interpretations of historical narrative. This project considers American hero-making, the commodification of history, and the relationship between historic facts and fantastic fictions. The flags offer three companion portraits to illuminate the absurdities to be found in the resulting visual and conceptual investigation.

Flags stand as Pop calling cards to those who frequent modern and contemporary art museums, but are also easily recognizable cultural symbols among a more general audience. That is all to say that I had hoped those objects would have both an immediate and deeper legibility. Perhaps in seeking a more complex site for these monuments of nation-state, I made two large and more abstract drawings: *Forty Flags* and *One Hundred Scarlet Carnations*. As with the other work in *To the Moon and Back*, I chose culturally significant historical source material. I constructed my large flag drawing by collecting every image published in *Life* of NASA's Mission Control, celebrating the successful landing of The Eagle on the lunar surface. By overlaying each image, one atop another, and omitting anything but American flags and the official seal of Apollo 11, I made an image that exists apart from any direct location or specific era.

For my second piece, I focused on stock photos of carnations many florists feature on their websites, starting with those located in Neil Armstrong's hometown of Wapakoneta, Ohio. Scarlet Carnations are the official state flower of Ohio. Not only is Ohio the home-state of Neil Armstrong but it also holds the record as being the home-state of more American astronauts than

any other.<sup>11</sup> Much like *Forty Flags*, *One Hundred Scarlet Carnations* provides a space for contemplation, the attention on the flowers alternating with areas of white voids. The didactic titles allow for a level of immediate access to the represented symbols, but the lack of connection of these images to people or a specific setting, along with the voids, troubles any easy narrative. but fog deeper narrative. While *Forty Flags* suggests celebration and revelry, *One Hundred Scarlet Carnations* holds a sense of calm reflection, not unlike a solemn wreath upon the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

I also first introduced an element of fluorescent orange acrylic ink in my two large drawings. The color serves as an ever-present reminder of the Soviet influence on America's exploration of space. Not only is fluorescent orange used as a standard warning in industrial settings worldwide, it is also symbolic of the spacesuit worn by Yuri Gagarin, a Russian cosmonaut and the first human in space. The integration of orange into my work became realized through aesthetic decisions made during the execution of *Forty Flags* and *One Hundred Scarlet Carnations*, wherein the color aided in compositional balance. This chromatic element reappeared in *Lunar Samples*, a collection of small sculptures in which I use florescent orange in areas of print misregistration.

I also considered the traditional Japanese technique of kintsugi in my use of orange. Similar to the Japanese philosophy of wabi-sabi, which embraces imperfections and highlights the history of an object, kintsugi repairs pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold. In my rocks, I substitute such gold cracks and crazes with fluorescent orange. By doing so I

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<sup>11</sup> The scarlet carnation was designated Ohio's state flower after the death of former president William McKinley. Historical testimonies suggest, McKinley wore a scarlet carnation on his lapel when making public appearances and commonly referred to it as his "lucky charm." At his final public appearance, McKinley removed his carnation to give to a young girl who was in attendance, McKinley was shot moments later and eventually succumbed to his wounds. This is one example of serendipitous historical events which litter the exhibition.

highlight the often-overlooked history behind the history of NASA and the Apollo moon missions.

*Lunar Samples* exists as a collection of moon rocks, each sample held upright by a pair of small, wooden feet. The sculptures themselves act as stand-ins for actual rocks harvested from the lunar surface. With silkscreened rock textures and additional acrylic line work, they call to mind theater props and the set-like quality of storefronts in classic Westerns, all of which intimates a conspiratorial view of Apollo 11's historic actuality.<sup>12</sup> One rock in the collection, emboldened by a large fluorescent orange "C" in script reminiscent of the Coca-Cola trademark, combines two conspiratorial theories and furthers the specific narrative of a staged lunar landing.<sup>1314</sup>

In the exhibition, I separated the lunar samples into four groups. The first three sit atop large pedestals labeled "Armstrong," "Aldrin," and "Collins." This evokes a commemorative display in which the bounty of discovery is shared equally between all three members of the Apollo 11 flight crew. The "C-Rock" is present but sits alone, separated from the larger displays.

The C-Rock disrupts the homogeneity of the specimen collection with the interjection of a foreign element. A specimen acts as one thing which represents, or acts as the type, the typical

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<sup>12</sup> While these works germinated from a seed planted in the work of a previous semester involving an enveloping mural of corn-like stalks, *Lunar Samples* was heavily influenced by Jim Shaw's "Superman body parts", an installation composed of the iconic superhero's body parts painted on shaped wooden panels.

<sup>13</sup> There remain to this day individuals who claim to have observed a glass Coca-Cola bottle kicked out of frame by either Armstrong or Aldrin while the two were on their exploration of the lunar surface during the live broadcast of Apollo 11's moon landing. Believers in this narrative claim that all remaining footage of the Apollo 11 moon walk has been edited to hide any evidence of such an occurrence.

<sup>14</sup> The "C-Rock" is a widely-held conspiracy theory amongst those who believe the moon landing to be a hoax. In this theory, each large rock on the moon stage was labeled with a letter to insure continuity during filming. One rock, however, became overturned between takes and a "C" can be seen on the exposed underbelly.



form, of all the others. The universe of the specimen discourages unique traits and characteristics. Through the incorporation of the C-Rock into the collection, the integrity of the specimen becomes jeopardized. Historical narrative itself, arguably its own normative specimen, is put into question. Historical facts become malleable, twisted and turned to provide a platform or vehicle for untruth, fictions, and myth building, often in the service of power. Much like the ever-present fluorescent orange, the C-Rock stands as a reminder of the rejection of historical truth in the face of undeniable evidence.

Much like the American flags, Coca-Cola recalls Pop art, notably the prints of Andy Warhol. Along with Warhol's Campbell's soup cans, the famously curvaceous Coca Cola bottle may be the most recognizable consumer product in the history of pop art. The Pop artist famously spoke of his infatuation with Coca-Cola, pontificating on the product as a great equalizer. Warhol philosophized that everyone from the poorest pauper and the richest king drink the same Coke and, as luck would have it "you can drink that same Coke, too."<sup>15</sup> This notion of unity through consumerism, of sharing the same status symbols as the elite, is not unique to Coca-Cola, but has existed as a simple and successful branding strategy. The American people hold allegiances to brands the same way they hold allegiances to political parties. To consume is to be a patriotic American.

While many products convey the notion of purchased patriotism, American identity, and national unity, Moon Pies prove a particularly resonant example for my moon mission. One does not have to look far to find anecdotes about the presence of Moon Pies at Mission Control during

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<sup>15</sup> Warhol's full quotation reads, "What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching T.V. and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Tylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better one." this quotation was taken from Fred. S. Kleiner's *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* (916).

the Apollo 11 mission. The confectionaries are still sold in the visitor centers of both the Kennedy and Johnson Space Centers.<sup>16</sup> The Moon Pie has been appropriated by NASA as a simple and direct one-liner novelty. This notion of reliving or re-enacting the conquering of a celestial body through the consumption of a snack cake seems a nebulous claim. However, this seemingly minor connection expands with the deconstruction of the historicity of Moon Pie. Invented in the coal region of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Moon Pies were marketed as the preferred snack of the Chattanooga coal miner. And later, particularly throughout the American South, the Moon Pie was marketed in conjunction with R.C. Cola as “the working man’s lunch.”<sup>17</sup>

The Moon Pie finds its way into *To the Moon and Back* in the form of an eleven-foot-long painting wherein the confection itself is represented as an isolated specimen with labels corresponding to the various seas and oceans visible from Earth on the face of the moon. The Sea of Tranquility, the landing place of Apollo 11 is absent, the only bite taken out of the Moon Pie. Here, to conquer and consume is one in the same, a gesture to the dual colonialist frontier missions of exploration and discovery, on the one hand, and consumption and conquest on the other.

The history of NASA and its many missions, spanning from The Mercury Program to the International Space Station, stands as rich with discovery as it does with political agendas and secretive technological advancements. I explore the complex nature of America’s history of space exploration through a series of double portraits. Inspired principally by Hans Holbein the

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, in 2009, for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Apollo 11 Kennedy Space Center was giving out pieces of what was described as “one of the world’s largest” Moon Pies- It was made with 14 lbs. of marshmallow and 6 lbs. of chocolate.

<sup>17</sup> “Gimme an R.C. Cola and a Moon Pie” was a song written and performed in the 1950’s by “Big Bill” Lister, a regular performer on the Grand Ole Opry and opening act for Hank Williams Sr. and his Drifting Cowboys.

Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533), these portraits depict select U.S. Presidents, displayed side by side, in diptychs that question the authority and narratives presented in traditional portraiture.<sup>18</sup> As the viewer shifts their glance from one portrait to another, the iconography and imagery of each piece shift, oscillating between the addition or redaction of information. These drawings work as companion pieces to expand of the history of each president and elaborate on their roles in the development and advancement of the country's space program.

In the history of art, portraiture has long held a prominent place in the representation of individuals or groups to convey certain truths (e.g. familial, political, ecclesiastical, spiritual, economic). In Roman times artists sought to convey an unvarnished truth in their subjects, a “warts and all” interpretation. Figures were not idealized, but instead identifiable through their specific physical characteristics—even if unflattering—to indicate their unique identity. In Ancient Greece portraits consisted of idealized figures. Artists eschewed mimetic images in favor of the universally ideal, a central dictate of beauty in that period. In the early Renaissance, betrothed women often appeared in profile portraits, while three-quarter views of sitters became common in the later Renaissance. Other paintings, including diptychs and triptychs, presented several individual portraits at once, or groups portraits.

There are few instances in the history of art in which a portrait depicts the same person twice, even in the same pose.<sup>19</sup> While the diptychs in this show are important as portraits we

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<sup>18</sup> When I was first introduced to Holbein's “The Ambassadors” and its history, I misinterpreted “double portrait” as two portraits of the same individual instead of two different people sharing the same space within a painting. I was informed of this error almost immediately, but the idea of a conflicting narrative affected by two portraits presented within the same field has stayed with me ever since.

<sup>19</sup> Exceptions might include those paintings that fall within the space of the continuous narratives, not uncommon in the Renaissance, wherein a figure is repeated to tell a story, as with Masaccio's *Tribute Money*. These images, however, are less portraits that figures operating as narratives of literary, biblical, or other narrative stories, and can hardly be considered portraits in

may even consider them in the same critical space as for instance, Rauschenberg's *Factum 1* and *Factum 2*. At the time, Rauschenberg created these pieces he sought to critique the abstract expressionist claims to existential truth in theory and did so in creating a pair of images that would blur the authenticity held by the viewer in considering the two pieces. With pieces that may in themselves be considered a diptych, Rauschenberg claimed that he could not see the difference between *Factum 1* and *Factum 2*. The originality of the first had been eclipsed by the repetition of the second. The reiteration of the Ab-Ex gestural mark indistinguishable in each piece from one to the other further undermined the superior philosophical space claimed by the previous generation of artists.

If we turn to the diptychs in this show, the repetition is important for me in terms of my work as a printmaker. One always considers the centrality of the first print in relation to subsequent prints<sup>20</sup>. That these are portraits undermines the uniqueness of identity itself- both in the physiognomies of the subjects and the character that we so often read into a portrait that we see. In all the diptychs, the central portraits are only slightly different. In the Gerald Ford and Reagan diptychs additional portraits, doppelgangers in biblical narrative and comic book cartoons, suggest the construction of identity as a mythical practice in and of itself.<sup>212223</sup>

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any kind of traditional sense.

<sup>20</sup> In the history of printmaking the first “proof” was not necessarily the most important, however, when culling an edition, the printmaker must first designate his “Bone a Terre” or “Good to Pull” and compare and judge each subsequent print to determine whether they will be included in a final edition. Printed editions are rarely numbered based on the order in which they are produced.

<sup>21</sup> In the portraits of Gerald Ford I reference the biblical tale of Jonah and the Whale as well as the story of Oedipus. Both stories, in my mind, hold similar allegories of divine intervention and destiny. Through the Impeachment of Vice President Spiro Agnew and the resignation of Richard Nixon, both elements are at play in Ford's reluctant journey to the office of President of the United States of America.

<sup>22</sup> In the Reagan diptych, Superman rests at the lower right hand corner of the first portrait. The second portrait is one of Reagan himself—both images were pulled from Frank Miller's “The

Throughout *To the Moon and Back*, history is presented, distorted, reinterpreted, and re-presented in order to encourage viewers to question their own roles as makers and enforcers of certain narratives in the contemporary post-truth landscape. My goal is to use the historical specificity of the 1969 moon landing as a case study in the generation and edification of various beliefs and truths. One cannot speak to the cultural shift of 1969 without acknowledging the importance of popular music.<sup>24</sup> As a printmaker my focus remains largely in the visual realm, but the construction of history and myths surrounding the moon landing occurred in the sonic realm as well—from Duke Ellington performing a commissioned “Moon Maiden” as part of ABC-TV’s 30 hours of continuous coverage of the first moon landing, to the sounds of Mission Control so well known today by the American public, to the popular songs released in 1969 celebrating the historic event.<sup>25</sup> I have chosen to acknowledge the multi-sensory, and sonic realm of this event, with *To the Moon and Back Original Score*, composed of the Billboard Top 40 songs from the week of July 20, 1969, played over archived audio recordings between the Apollo

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Dark Knight Returns” (1988) a comic book series of in which depicts, as well as the return of Batman, Superman colluding with the American government to disrupt the Soviet threat during the cold war.

<sup>23</sup> In 2008, writer, comedian, and star of the comedy news program *The Colbert Report*, Stephen Colbert loaned his official portrait to the Smithsonian for inclusion in their National Portrait Gallery. The painting has been on display on and off between the gallery’s restrooms, above the water fountain. The portrait was removed on April 20th, 2015. The inclusion of Colbert’s portrait, which does not reflect the comedian himself, but rather his on-air, bombastic, ultra-conservative persona, acts as an advanced and ingenious form of satire in that it broadcasts the fictional aspects of historical narrative in a space in which those fictions are ignored. Through the inclusion of Colbert’s portrait, the entire historical narrative as it is presented in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery is instantly negated.

<sup>24</sup> The Summer of Love, The Civil Rights Movement, The Manson Family Murders, Woodstock—all of these events or movements were emboldened by messages in popular music. Of course, there are countless other instances which could be listed, these are only a few extreme examples of paradigm shift under the influence of popular music.

<sup>25</sup> 1] Richard Jurek, “Duke Ellington’s Ode to the First Moon Landing,” *Air & Space: Smithsonian* (10 Feb. 2015) <http://www.airspacemag.com/daily-planet/duke-ellingtons-ode-first-moon-landing-180954208/> (Accessed 20 Feb. 2017).

11 flight crew and Mission Control in Houston, TX. Through this soundtrack, I present both popular music broadcasts and official government communications simultaneously as another avenue into the layering of history, identity, and culture and the ways in which these constructions can both clarify and occlude various messages.

## **Re-entry**

*To the Moon and Back* presents historical evidence and conspiratorial narratives, fact and fantasy, simultaneously. Myths speak to stories individuals and societies tell about themselves, the values they hold, and the role of knowledge in daily practice. Much like facts and historical truths, myths provide another lens through which people form their identities individually and within a wider culture. Today, even in a post-Enlightenment age, we often see the role of myth emerging in the realm of conspiracy theories, theories that have imprinted the American cultural landscape.

Conspiracy theories thrive off humankind's biases and instinct for pattern recognition. By presenting an already acknowledged fringe theory alongside evidence to the contrary, *To the Moon and Back* approaches the notion of conspiracy theory and America's post-factual landscape through a critical lens, asking its audience to carefully consider their role in the rhetorical positioning of historical facts and myths in the construction of the American ideological landscape.

## Appendix: Figures



Figure 1: Michael Pennekamp, *To the Moon and Back* (Gallery View), 2017.  
(Image by Esther Nooner)



Figure 2: Mike Pennkamp, *American Icons*, Acrylic, Silkscreen, Graphite, Imported American Flags, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)





Figure 3: Michael Pennekamp, *Forty Flags*, 55.5"x 44.5", Graphite, Acrylic Paint, Latex Paint, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)

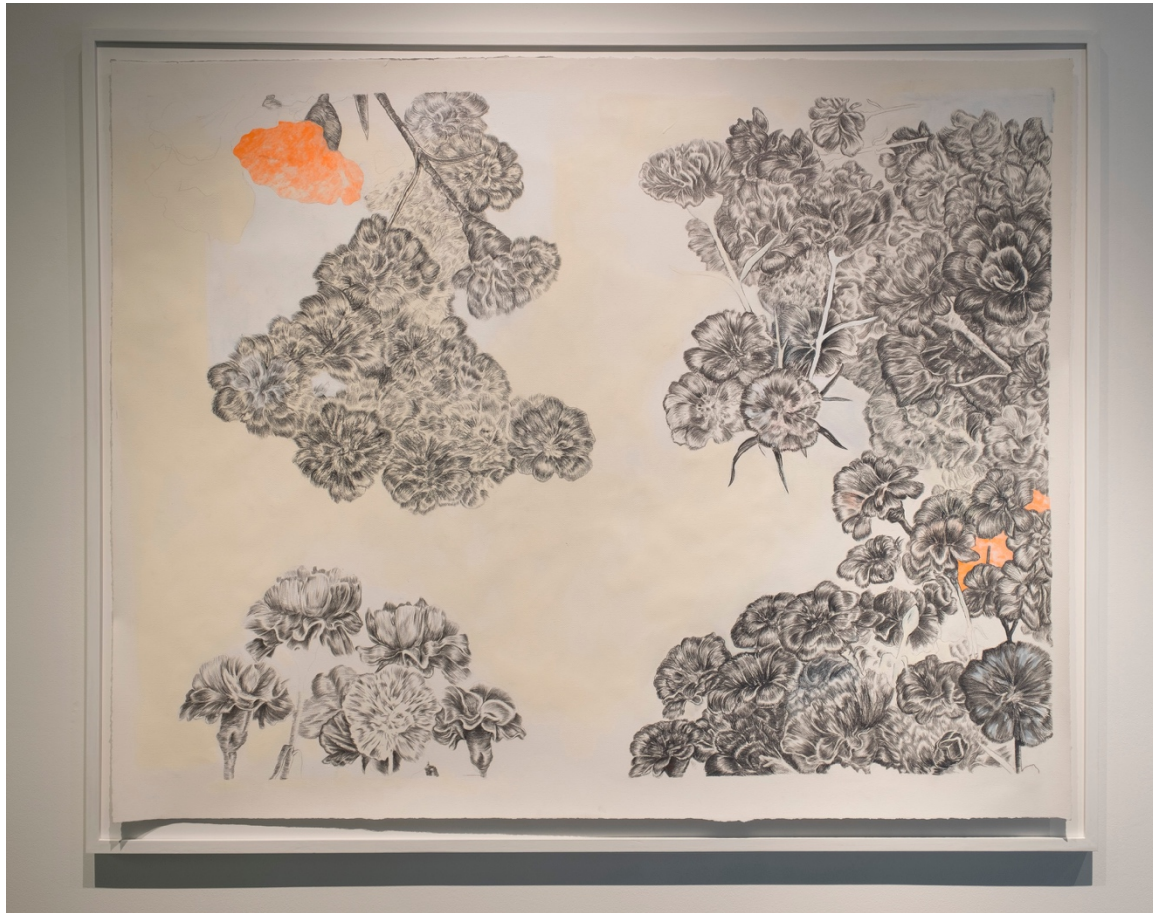


Figure 4: Michael Pennekamp, *One Hundred Scarlet Carnations*, 55.5"x44.5", Graphite, Acrylic Paint, Latex Paint, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)



Figure 5: Michael Pennekamp, *Lunar Samples (Aldrin)*, Dimensions Variable, Silkscreen, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Graphite, Phosphorescent Paint on MDF, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)





Figure 6: Michael Pennekamp, *Lunar Samples (Aldrin)* (Detail), Dimensions Variable, Silkscreen, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Graphite, Phosphorescent Paint on MDF, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)

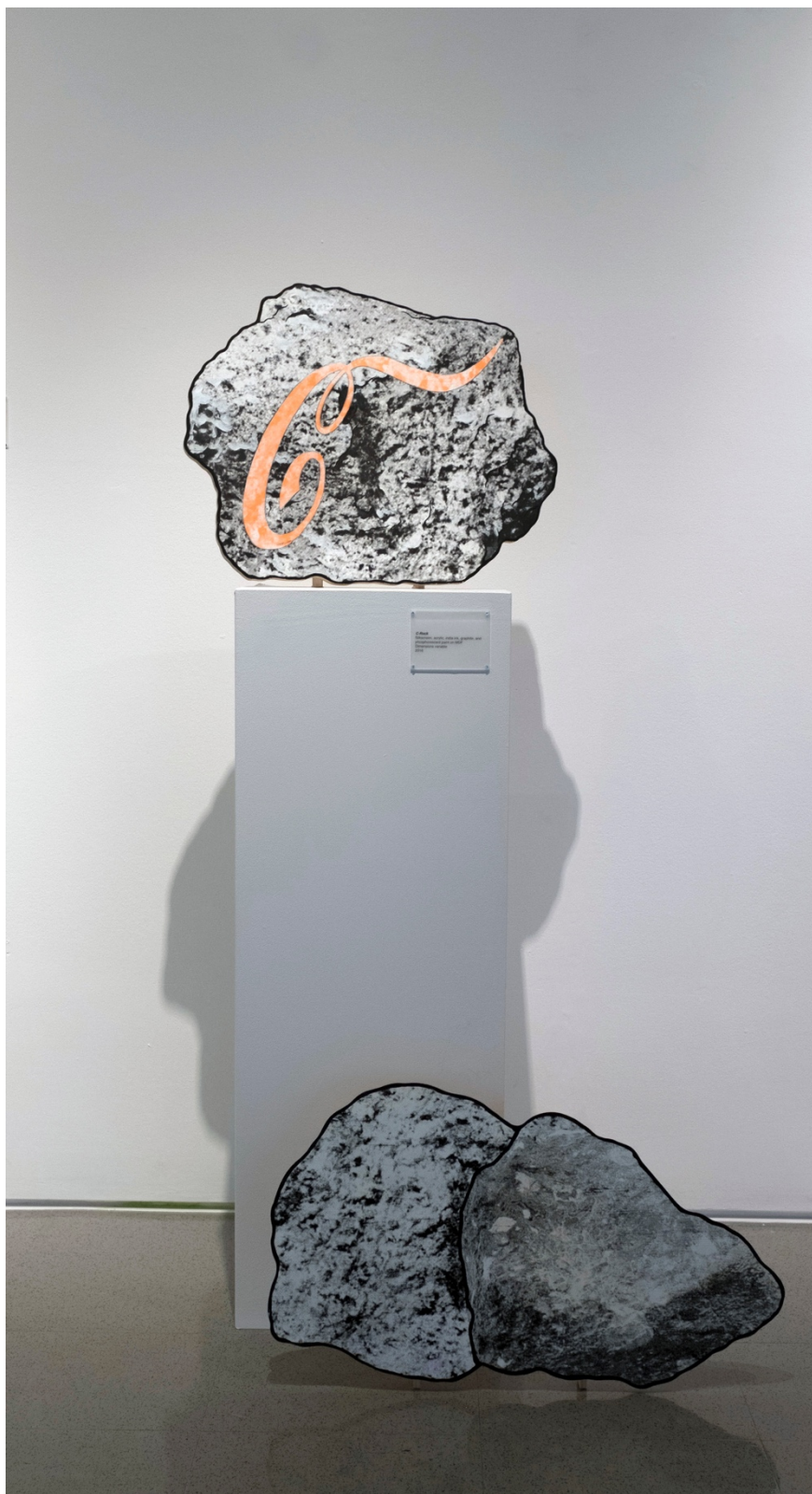


Figure 7: Michael Pennekamp, *Lunar Samples (C-Rock)*, Dimensions Variable, Silkscreen, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Graphite, Phosphorescent Paint, Chine Collé on MDF, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)





Figure 8: Michael Pennekamp, *Moon Pie (Lunar Surface)*, 132" x 71", Acrylic Paint, Vinyl Letters, Graphite, Phosphorescent Paint on unstretched canvas, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)



Figure 9: Michael Pennekamp, *Chapter 1: Harry Truman or God in the Machine*, 28" x 40.5" (each), Graphite, Editing Pencil, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Vinyl Letters, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)



Figure 10: Michael Pennekamp, *Chapter 2: John F. Kennedy or St. Jude, Patron Saint of Lost Causes*, 28" x 40.5" (each), Graphite, Editing Pencil, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Vinyl Letters, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)





Figure 11: Michael Pennekamp, *Chapter 3: Gerald Ford or Devine Intervention and Apollo-Soyuz*, 28" x 40.5" (each), Graphite, Editing Pencil, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Vinyl Letters, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)



Figure 12: Michael Pennekamp, *Chapter 4: Ronald Reagan or Written in the Stars*, 28" x 40.5" (each), Graphite, Editing Pencil, Acrylic Paint, India Ink, Vinyl Letters, Silkscreen, Chine Collé on paper, 2017 (Image by Esther Nooner)

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